

# The performance of Panggung Bangsawan in Riau Lingga

## A reconstruction of a theatrical process

SUTAMAT ARYBOWO

### ABSTRACT

Panggung Bangsawan is a popular folk theatre in Riau Lingga. The ups and downs in its performance are attributed to changes in social, political, and cultural conditions. This article is a reconstruction of a near extinct Panggung Bangsawan group in the Teluk village in the islands of Riau Lingga. First, I have attempted to describe the staging process; second, to endeavour to understand the phenomenon of change which occurs when a folk tale is transformed from the written work into a performance; and third, to expose the transformation of a script (text) divided into scenes into a performance. This is an attempt to explain the relation between the audience's response to a text when it is staged. This article is expected to give a more profound understanding of how the society that supports Panggung Bangsawan remembers its past and its ideal views while comprehending how the shift in life values emerges in a staged folk tale.

### KEYWORDS

Panggung Bangsawan, staging process, reconstruction, transformation, Riau Lingga.

### 1 INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

In the 1990s, I had the opportunity to conduct research on folk theatre in Riau Lingga. After travelling through several islands: Singkep, Lingga and surroundings, I did not find one single folk theatre which still staged plays. However, I did encounter an old ex-stage property building with

<sup>1</sup> This article based on the paper that was presented at the *Seminar Antar Bangsa Tradisi Lisan Melayu*, Klub Danau Golf, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, Malaysia, 17-18 November 2009, and also commemorated the director of folk theater, Mr Achmad Atan (Cik Atan) who had passed away.

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SUTAMAT ARYBOWO studied Philosophy at Gadjah Mada University Yogyakarta. He finished his PhD thesis in Cultural Studies at Udayana University in 2008. Since 1982 he is a researcher at the Indonesian Institute for Sciences and guest lecturer at the Faculty of the Humanities, University of Indonesia. Sutamat Arybowo may be contacted at: s\_arybowo@yahoo.com.

decomposing sections of wood construction. Did I choose the wrong time and environment for this research? I did not give up, however, and continued having conversations with local public figures, village heads (*pengulu*), and village elders. Nearing the end of my research time, I arrived at a village called Teluk, Riau Lingga islands and found a group, called Panggun Bangsawan, which was involved in activities of staging a play.

In this area, Panggun Bangsawan is a mixed theatre with various musical instruments, dances, and stories. Performances are supported by sponsors and are highly dependent on the audience (Tan Sooi Beng 1993). Individuals willing to sponsor a performance are usually local bosses (*toke*) or local entrepreneurs, such as Chinese, Arab, Malay, and Javanese tradesmen. Simultaneously with the development of a multiple society with different ethnic backgrounds, such as Chinese, Javanese, Indian, Malay, Arab, Bugis, and Boyan (Bawean), the staging of Panggun Bangsawan became very festive. Actors consist of fishermen, agricultural farmers, hawkers, coffee shop employees, and even Elementary School teachers with the majority of the audience being inhabitants of villages by the sea and in small ports.

A performance is staged in an open, privately owned area or public field of approximately 40 meters long and less than 20 meters wide close to the market or port (Kadir 1988, see the Photograph). The performances commence at 8.00 pm and end at 12.00 pm, or even at 1.00 am and are staged not only on public holidays or Sundays, but at any time. Panggun Bangsawan is staged during the *south season* (between September-December), when it is a good time for the inhabitants to get together.



Photograph by the author, 1993.

A semi-permanent stage measures 8 metres long, 7 metres wide, and with a height of approximately 6 metres from ground to roof. The stages support is made of the trunks of coconut trees 1 metre in height with wooden planks arranged on top of it, and zinc or sagopalm leaves as its roof. The audience seats in the performance area are made of wooden beams arranged in rows and supported 0.5 metre above the ground and surrounded by a wall of approximately 2 metres high. A gateway adorns the entrance which is located close to the ticket sales box (see the Chart).

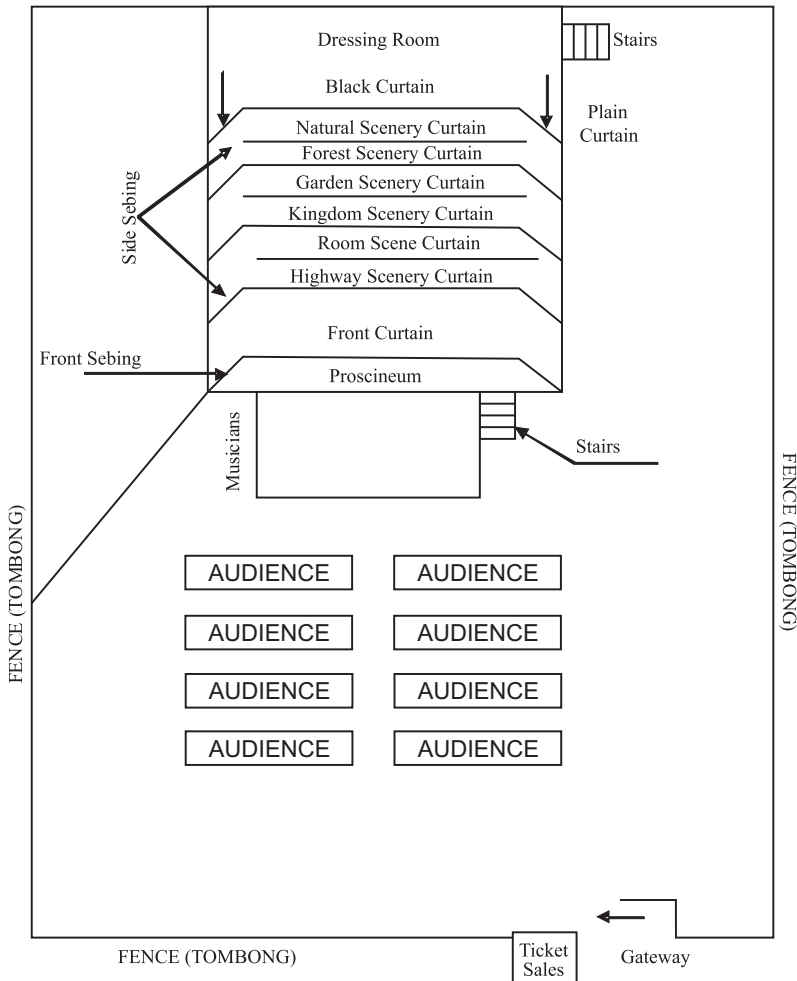


Chart. Sketch of Panggung Bangsawan in Riau Lingga.

An accordion, violin, *pasu* drum, *tabla*, guitar, gong, marracas, tambourine, and *rebana* are the musical instruments used to accompany dances, songs, and the plot. Dances are flexible and not binding, songs are sung intermittently in sad and happy notes following the plot which is “kingdom oriented”<sup>2</sup> in

<sup>2</sup> Basically the background of the plot is always related to life in a kingdom or palace. The story is similar to that of Ketoprak in Java which tells of the life of royalty. The only difference

different backgrounds, such as China, India, the Middle East, Java, Bugis, Europe, and stories taken from the Malay Chronicles (*Hikayat Melayu*). The “synopsis”, arranged by the director, generally consists of 5-10 acts or episodes. Each change of scene is marked by a change of scenery by means of an illustrated curtain as backdrop and the number of curtains depends on the number of acts. There are curtains with forest scenery, a stone cave by the sea shore, and the typical scene is a curtain with a castle backdrop. Panggung Bangsawan is usually staged with 30-40 actors depending on the story presented.

The performance consists of four parts: the prologue, the dialogue, the monologue, and the epilogue. The prologue consists of *tablo* music with an opening song entitled *Selamat datang*, poetry reading, and an introduction delivered by the master of ceremonies who simultaneously introduces the actors and actresses who play the roles in the story. The dialogue is between these characters playing the role of king, the nobility (male and female), and *khadam* (comedians) who are very funny. The monologue usually appears in the scene when the king is alone and pondering on the kingdom’s factual situation. The epilogue takes the form of a message from the master of ceremonies which reflects the motto “A just King is worshipped, a cruel King is opposed”, and finally the performance closes with the song *Gilang si patu gilang* sung by all players signaling that the show is over. This performance is called Panggung Bangsawan (Theatre of the Nobility) or Wayang of Nobility or just Nobility by the audience and master of ceremonies because the story is about kings.

The purpose of this article is first, to attempt to describe the process of staging of a near extinct folk theatre group in Riau Lingga. This theatre was considered popular, and has its heyday, and can be considered as the pride of its society; at the same time this theatre brought members of its society together. Second, it is an attempt to understand the transformation of an oral folk tale into a performance. Third, to discuss, when staged, the relation between the text and the response of the audience. Malay literature basically incorporates ideal ideas and views.<sup>3</sup> Thus, through research on the staging of these folk tales it is possible to see how far the shift in life values has emerged.

## 2 THE PROCESS OF STAGING A PERFORMANCE

Around the end of 1992, the Singkep Tin Mining Unit was gradually closed. In the first phase, no less than 6000 employees were dismissed and one of them was Achmad Atan (Cik Atan) who, whether he liked it or not, was forced to return to his village on the shores of Singkep Island. He received a small severance pay from the company which, however, was sufficient as working capital for his future and he was among those who did not spend his severance

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is the language used, Panggung Bangsawan uses Malay and Ketoprak uses Javanese.

<sup>3</sup> Literature is a form of social expression and therefore related to social, cultural, and political issues (see Ahmad 1988; Braginsky 1998).

pay uselessly. A few weeks after his dismissal, he opened a small fishery enterprise. By a true change of profession, he collected fish from the small fishermen in his village and then took them to the market on his motorbike. When the *durian* season came, he also tried his luck at *durian* trading.

His business did not survive long, approximately two years, after which it ended because of capital loss. Thus he was really unemployed and stayed home everyday watching over his children who were still in Secondary School. During that time he had the opportunity to remember and reminisce about his past. When he was working at the tin company, he often assisted in staging cultural performances under the auspicion of the company. He could play several musical instruments to accompany the band and the Malay orchestra when staging a performance not far from the company's site. So one day he talked to his ex-leader who still lived in Dabo<sup>4</sup> and asked whether he could borrow the company's instruments. His ex-leader gave his consent half-heartedly; Cik Atan fully understood his leader's reluctance. He then hurried home to his village and, with his relatives, he intended to establish a Panggung Bangsawan theatre. After the physical stage preparations were completed, he gathered the youngsters from around Teluk village and tried to interest them in rehearsing for the Panggung Bangsawan.

On a stage set up from boards and used zinc, the youngsters practiced acting freely. Apparently they had heard of Panggung Bangsawan performances from their parents before, but only then they directly felt and saw the demonstration Cik Atan presented as trainer. Cik Atan confessed that he was very moved with the initial presentation of these youngsters. As an introductory performance, Cik Atan took the role of story adaptor and director presenting the *Permata yang hilang di Pulau Langkawi* story (The jewel lost on Langkawi Island).<sup>5</sup> In this story, the audience was taken back to their past. The re-emergence of this story in Panggung Bangsawan in Riau Lingga in reality coincided with the cooperation of the growth triangle Singapore-Johor-Riau in 1991,<sup>6</sup> but the folk tale was not performed by Cik Atan until the end of 1993.

Since its first performance, in Teluk village, the local inhabitants' longing for Panggung Bangsawan – the familiar name given by the society for this performance – was fulfilled. It had been a long while since a Panggung

<sup>4</sup> Dabo is the capital of Singkep, located on Singkep Island. This city, which was built by the Dutch Indies government, was in the past the centre of a tin company with sufficient infrastructure, such as a sea port, airport, electricity, telephone line, asphalt roads, and large houses owned by the Dutch. Since the tin company closed down in 1992 by order of the New Order government, its inhabitants decreased by 1000 annually, and it has now become a dead city. As in Bangka-Belitung, what is currently visible on the soil of Singkep Island are gaping holes as the remains of tin mines.

<sup>5</sup> Langkawi is the name of an island in the State of Kelantan. At present, the Government of Malaysia established this island as a second tourism destination after the Genting Highlands. The story of *Permata yang hilang di Pulau Langkawi* is not familiar to the inhabitants of that island, but well-known in Riau Lingga. I assume that this story is newly created although the director considers this a historical story (Arybowo 2008).

<sup>6</sup> The growth triangle is an economic development concept of neighbouring countries Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia (see Lee Tsao Yuan 1991; Nasution 2001).



Bangsawan was performed in that village as there was no one to instigate it and its equipment had decayed. Some intellectual bystanders commented that Cik Atan's return to his village was like finding this long lost tradition again. Since then, Panggung Bangsawan at Teluk village has been the centre of activity and was visited by the public, as surely almost once every two months there is a Panggung Bangsawan performance at Teluk village with self-managed ticket sales. According to Cik Atan, if the stage is not used by Panggung Bangsawan, it can be rented to other performances, such as a band show from Pekanbaru or *joget* from Medan.

As soon as the Panggung Bangsawan group was established in Teluk village, it became the focal interest of city people to act as participants in festivals. In 1995 the Panggung Bangsawan group from Teluk village was sent to Tanjungpinang by the cultural inspector to participate in a Malay cultural festival. Representing the subdistrict of Singkep, this group won the title of best performing theatre group. During the festival, the group was able to present its expertise and to watch performances of other groups. Due to time limitations set by the committee, the story performed underwent significant cuts compared to performances in their home village. Duration was not the only limitation, other requirements such as the number of actors, costume, musical instruments all had to conform to the rules set by the committee.

Through preparations for this festival, outside forces began to play a role and as Gramsci (1973) stated, the state began its intervention. This included the studios, the Cultural Inspector, the Local Government, and the Festival Committee who all played a role in setting the performance, arranging not only sponsor messages, but even the esthetics of the actors. In the case of Panggung Bangsawan, story content usually conforms to the government's message.

At that time the capacity of Jagoh Harbour, where ships connecting Tanjungpinang to Singkep Island were moored, increased enabling two ships to moor simultaneously. Therefore, the mobility of inhabitants from Dabo to Jagoh Harbour through Teluk village became quite high. Considering this, on the Indonesian Independence Day celebration in 1997, Teluk village set up a Fair (Pasar Malam) sponsored by trade bosses of Dabo and Tanjungpinang. Various games and competitions with many attractive prizes for the winners were a major component of this fair. All this was, naturally, not for free as visitors participated by buying tickets for these games.

Besides these games, for three consecutive nights there was also a Panggung Bangsawan performance at this Fair. The management attempted to organize the performance independently without connection to any other groups. Because the stage had been fenced off and a ticket box was already there, it was not difficult for the committee to arrange the performance. Panggung Bangsawan was able to perform by selling tickets which they managed on their own. A Panggung Bangsawan performance is, in truth, not a profitable event because the income from ticket sales is not more than the cost to rent musical instruments and other requirements. Luckily the actors

did not ask for a honorarium.

As renting musical instruments was too costly for the Panggung Bangsawan group, one of the solutions to avoid too much financial loss was to find a sponsor. In the past it was easier to obtain sponsorship from the bosses (*toké*), but it is now difficult to find a boss who is willing to sponsor a Panggung Bangsawan performance.

### 3 PANGGUNG BANGSAWAN AT THE FAIR

During the three-night performance at Teluk village, the story of *Permata yang hilang di Pulau Langkawi* was re-staged. Because of its Malay Peninsula geocultural background and as it is quite popular in Riau Lingga, it is often re-staged.<sup>7</sup>

*Permata yang hilang di Pulau Langkawi* at Teluk village is divided into the following scenes (source: Typed script, compiled by Achmad Atan, no year; see also Arybowo 2008):

#### Act 1

##### Scene 1 (House of the Temenggung)

A meeting between Datuk Temenggung and Panglima Gading to discuss the strategy how to seize power from Sultan Langkawi and the intention to marry the beautiful Queen Zahara. They are in league with Mamanda Wazir as the representative of Sultan Langkawi in Tasik Segamat.

##### Scene 2 (Langkawi Palace)

A joyfull occasion attended by all Palace dignitaries with entertainment for the young Princes: Sultan Muda Aman aged 6, Sultan Muda Amin aged 2, and Princess Tun Seri Raja aged 4. Suddenly, by cruel cunning, Sultan Langkawi was stabbed with a kris by Datuk Temenggung.

Datuk Menteri was able to save Sultan Langkawi and Sultan Muda Aman and Amin. Seriously wounded, Sultan Langkawi was taken to Pulau Delima under the protection of Datuk Penghulu Pulau Delima who was the best friend of Datuk Menteri.

Under the threat of beheading Tun Seri Raja if she refused, Datuk Temenggung coerced Queen Zahara to accept his hand in marriage. Datuk Bendahara was also tortured. Finally, Queen Zahara agreed to marry Datuk Temenggung.

##### Scene 3 (The Forest/Journey)

The journey of Datuk Menteri and Sultan Langkawi, Sultan Muda Aman and Amin and their nurse to Pulau Delima to ask for protection from Datuk

<sup>7</sup> A folk tale which is staged over and over will, certainly, undergo changes according to the location of the performance. The title remains the same, but when staged in a different place it always undergoes an actualization based on location. Humour also adjusts itself to the characteristics of local inhabitants (see also Bujang 1975).

Penghulu, Datuk Menteri's best friend.

## Act 2

### At Pulau Delima/Cottage

Fifteen years later, thanks to Datuk Penghulu Pulau Delima's tutoring, Sultan Muda Aman and Amin were now adults and had become brave and agile warriors.

Sultan Langkawi, assisted by Datuk Menteri and Datuk Pengulu and his people, intended to seize the throne of the Sultanate of Pulau Langkawi.

Sultan Muda Aman and Amin were sent to Pulau Langkawi disguised as sailors from Pulau Pinang under the name Kelana and Budiman. Both tried their luck to become trusted guards of the Palace.

## Act 3

### At Langkawi Palace

Datuk Temenggung was a very cruel Sultan; he ordered his Generals to arrest farmers and fishermen who did not pay taxes and had them tortured. He also ordered them to find virgins and forced them to become his concubines. Thus, extortion and torture occurred intermittently.

The Palace Dignitaries who obeyed his orders were promoted one level and Panglima Gading was appointed Datuk Menteri.

To find a replacement for Panglima Gading a competition of dexterity was held between Panglima Muda Kencana and Panglima Muda Bandan from Tasik Segamat. Finally, Panglima Muda Kencana was appointed as Panglima Besar of the Langkawi Palace. The Sultan ordered Datuk Bendahara and Panglima Muda Bandan to find a trustworthy gardener. Datuk Bendahara pledged to do his best.

## Act 4

### Scene 1 (At the Seashore/Forest)

Kelana and Budiman were on a journey to a house in Pulau Langkawi. They were followed by the Nurse and Tun Seri Raja.

### Scene 2 (The House of Datuk Bendahara)

Kelana and Budiman were welcomed by Datuk Bendahara and lived at Datuk Bendahara's home. Both expressed their desire to find any kind of work. Datuk Bendahara was overjoyed because he was looking for Palace gardeners. Both travellers were invited to rest.

The Nurse and Tun Seri Raja appeared as guests at the home of Datuk Bendahara and asked who the travellers were. Tun Seri Raja and the Nurse saw



the arrival of both travellers at the shore/edge of the forest. Datuk Bendahara pretended that Kelana and Budmian were his relatives from Pulau Pinang whom he had specifically ordered to come and work at the Flower Garden of the Palace.

Datuk Bendahara called both travellers and introduced them to Princess Tun Seri Raja. With heart-breaking politeness Kelana and Budiman paid their respects to the Princess and explained their origins. Finally the Nurse and Princess Tun Seri Raja left.

#### Act 5

##### In the Flower Garden

Kelana and Budiman were having fun; Kelana attempted to predict his brother's fortune by reading his palm. Budiman was intent on listening to Kelana's explanation, sometimes both laughed exuberantly. Tun Seri Raja arrived with her Nurse to see what Kelana and Budiman were laughing at. Tun Seri Raja surprised Kelana and Budiman and asked that her fate be predicted.

Politely and humorously, Kelana read Tun Seri Raja's palm; sometimes there was laughter from the Nurse, at times Tun Seri Raja felt sad.

Suddenly Budiman saw a Palace dignitary enter the garden. Tun Seri Raja forbade Kelana and Budiman to leave, but Kelana and Budiman told her that they were only going to hide behind the shrub to see what was going to happen.

It was Panglima Gading, now Datuk Menteri, who came to see Tun Seri Raja to express his feelings. There was an angry exchange of words between the Menteri Muda and Tun Seri Raja. The arrival of Panglima Kencana added to the heated situation as Panglima Kencana was angered by Datuk Menteri Muda because he was also in love with Tun Seri Raja.

A duel ensued, Tun Seri Raja screamed as Panglima Kencana was stabbed to death by Menteri Muda's kris. Datuk Temenggung entered with the Palace guards. Menteri Muda was arrested by Datuk Temenggung, but he fought back and intended to fight Datuk Temenggung. Another fight ensued between Menteri Muda and Datuk Temenggung, meanwhile Kelana stepped forward to defend Datuk Temenggung. Menteri Muda escaped with the threat that at anytime he would return to destroy the Palace. Datuk Temenggung appointed Kelana as Sultan Muda and wed him to Tun Seri Raja.

#### Act 6

##### At Langkawi Palace

Kelana was inaugurated as Sultan Muda Langkawi and married Tun Seri Raja. Words of honor were sworn before Datuk Temenggung: to protect the

Langkawi Sultanate and defend the life of Datuk Temenggung against any person attempting to overthrow the Langkawi Sultanate.

Datuk Temenggung left the Throne Hall while Kelana was still conversing with Tun Seri Raja. Budiman, who had been appointed Panglima Muda besides Panglima Bandan, entered politely to see Kelana. Kelana called the Nurse to take Tun Seri Raja to bed.

Kelana and Budiman discussed their father's message given at Pulau Delima. Kelana forgot himself and went against his father's wishes, whereas Budiman was steadfast in his decision to kill Datuk Temenggung. After a harsh exchange of words, Kelana and Budiman became engaged in a duel and stabbed each other. When Kelana was about to stab Budiman for the so manyth time, Tun Seri Raja screamed and begged Kelana not to continue. Bendahara entered to cool down the situation and took Budiman back to his home.

#### Act 7

##### At Pulau Delima

Budiman related the story of Kelana who had become Sultan Muda at Langkawi and is married to the Sultan's daughter.

Sultan Langkawi was angered, Datuk Menteri and Datuk Penghulu pledged to help the Sultan to regain the throne of the Sultanate of Langkawi and arrest Datuk Temenggung. Finally the group set sail to Pulau Langkawi.

#### Act 8

Datuk Temenggung, Queen Zahara, Kelana as Sultan Muda and Tun Seri Raja as his consort, and Panglima Bandan together with the guards and Nurse as well as Datuk Bendahara were surrounded. A guard notified them that unknown enemies were within Langkawi and many soldiers had been slain. Kelana, for the honor of the Langkawi Sultanate, decided to fight. Suddenly Panglima Gading, who had run away some time ago, appeared to challenge Kelana; thus Panglima Bandan was delegated to save Datuk Temenggung, Queen Zahara, Tun Seri Raja and Datuk Bendahara.

After Panglima Gading was killed, Kelana went off to seek Tun Seri Raja.

#### Act 9

##### In a Forest

Budiman was fighting with Datuk Temenggung; finally Datuk Temenggung was stabbed and seriously wounded. Kelana appeared, another fight ensued between Kelana and Budiman. Kelana was stabbed and Tun Seri Raja, Queen Zahara, and Panglima Bandan entered.

Then, unexpectedly, Sultan Langkawi, Datuk Menteri, and Datuk Penghulu

Delima entered. After glancing at each other, Sultan Langkawi was reunited with his consort Zahara.

After explanations, they all realized who Kelana, Budiman, and Tun Seri Raja were.

This story was quite popular and was staged repeatedly including during the festival. Ever since Panggung Bangsawan from Teluk village entered the Malay cultural festival in Tanjungpinang, Cik Atan felt that he was always under criticism. The story's division into acts, which is an important element in a performance, had to conform to the committee's request as it is adjusted in terms of time duration and number of players. Acting and physical appearance are now considered from an esthetic point of view. In Cik Atan's opinion, everytime his group performs there is protest from the older as well as younger generation. So what does the audience want? Finally, Cik Atan realized that with the intervention of the various parties who try to revive the nearly extinct Panggung Bangsawan, its performance became increasingly complicated.

The protests from the audience as well as the actors often cause Cik Atan to adopt an uncaring and sulky attitude. He recalls that in the 1960s, the performance of Panggung Bangsawan was more natural; the costumes and sceneries, the make up of the prima donna, and the acting was truly expressive. Although the story is about royalty, criticism against the king is openly expressed. Cik Atan himself is very interested in stories related to "power struggle", reasoning that these stories provide the audience with the true image of past kingdoms. It was his desire to stage these stories as realistically as possible and not, as currently suggested, that they should reflect the magnificence and glory of kings of the past. Stories staged by Cik Atan tended to show that kingdoms in the past were very aggressive in seizing power and intent on conquering other kingdoms. On the contrary, present stories, in his opinion, are forced to conform to the suggestions of present leaders to reflect glory or grandeur.

It is my opinion that the shift in plot (the reality of power struggles in the past to stories about the grandeur and glory of kingdoms in the past) performed by Panggung Bangsawan, is a reflection of the political system enforced in Riau Lingga during the New Order era. Prior to that, during the Old Order and the confrontation period when Cik Atan was the stage director, the valid political system was to openly follow the "mechanism of power", that power could be implemented through conquest as far as it adheres to the mechanism of power. On the contrary, stories performed in the New Order era reflected the political system in force at that time which was oriented towards the "poetics of power", where conquests should be covered up by highlighting the grandeur and glory of a nation, for example by symbolic ceremonies (Arybowo 2008). These symbols were also reflected in the attitude of local officials who were very conscious of being "local people" who should have an interest in the capital city. For example, the people of Kampung

Teluk demonstrated interest in Dabo; the inhabitants of Dabo demonstrated interest in Tanjungpinang; the people of Tanjungpinang demonstrated interest in Jakarta. In political anthropology, the reflection of power in Panggung Bangsawan is referred to as “theatre state” which states that politics is not managed through direct power, but through the use of symbols and images (Geertz 2000). At that time, Panggung Bangsawan performances tended to highlight the message that the king and the state are symbols of exemplars.

The shift in plot is related to the new meaning given by civil society (individuals) as well as political society (the state). The example shows that a public figure and retired teacher, can indicate his direct domination by admonishing that a Panggung Bangsawan story should only be performed as he sees fit. The state, such as the Local Government, the Cultural Board, the Festival Committee, and others, can implement control over/censor the plot and esthetics through its power. The stage director can, therefore, choose to use at least three methods (Arybowo 2008):

- a) Avoid performances with a political theme which is difficult as the charactersitic of the Panggung Bangsawan is to perform stories of kingdoms.
- b) To present political issues in a creative form while retaining its artistic value, such as presenting metaphores and metonyms.
- c) To express the storyteller’s opinion according to reality, such as taking a Malay historical story but with actualization of current conditions.

#### 4 RITUAL ACTIVITIES AND SOCIAL STABILITY

As mentioned earlier, a performance of Panggung Bangsawan in Riau Lingga society in the past was a ritual activity. Ritual, in this case, is defined as an activity conducted according to the standards of society which develops a sense of togetherness while, at the same time, uniting a community (Turner 1978). In Riau Lingga, this activity may take the shape of a traditional ceremony, a religious ceremony, a state ceremony, and a folk theatre performance. One of these activities was to revive Panggung Bangsawan, implemented by Cik Atan, an inhabitant of Teluk village.

Initially, Cik Atan funded this activity himself and thereafter he built a “stage”. At that time he wanted to invite youngsters, especially those who were jobless or no longer went to school, to join, practice, and familiarize themselves with the Panggung Bangsawan performance. Through this “stage”, he was able to familiarize himself again with the younger generation and with his village. All this time, as an employee of the tin company, he was unable to follow the aspirations of the people of his village. It was his hope that by establishing the Panggung Bangsawan the aspirations of the people would re-emerge because the “stage” was not only a place of performance, but also a place for surrounding inhabitants to deliberate. In this area, a village does not have a *balai desa* or *balai adat* (village community centre) as is the case in other villages, so that the “stage” performs the function of a *balai adat*.

Panggung Bangsawan, which was self-managed, was the place where its

members were trained to recognize responsibility and live independently. The surrounding inhabitants accepted this as did other groups in society, especially religious leaders, who did not see its presence as a disruption to social stability.

Cik Atan's concern with Panggung Bangsawan at Teluk village is actually a realization to revive this cultural activity among the inhabitants of a seaside village. Or more concretely, he wanted to offer this cultural activity to the lower class as was the case in the past. As reflected in the festival, this cultural activity was, in reality, only concentrated in the cities. Thus, Panggung Bangsawan with its ups and downs in the village will lose its social function as its members are taunted with performances through cultural activities in the city.

The current rise of Panggung Bangsawan at Teluk village is none other than a performance reconstruction as the real performance is difficult to find. Facts outside of the performance, as has been described, are too general. However, if understood chronologically, the performance of Panggung Bangsawan at Teluk village can reveal the rise of a two-part staging process. First, the physical preparation conducted by Cik Atan by constructing "the stage" and gathering the youngsters even though Cik Atan had to sacrifice a lot, materially and spiritually. Second, Cik Atan as creator and stage director had to consider the substance of the performance which includes: reading the script, creating a story, reworking the story into a performance, and training the actors who re-interpret the story in the form of a prologue, dialogue, monologue, and epilogue.

In reality after the performance ends, the process of staging continues.<sup>8</sup> Some of the new interpreters in the audience give an evaluation of a performance so that Cik Atan should always be prepared to receive praise as well as criticism, whether polite or not. In this case the staging process can be understood as a continuing process and not just an initial preparation until the end of a performance, because a performance is part of the life of a community (Lindsay 1991).

Currently, the dimension of Panggung Bangsawan which should be studied is to understand wise leadership in Riau Lingga, interpreted into the election of the Governor and the Regent, in order not to forget its qualifications and criteria. The stories of Panggung Bangsawan indicate that the profile of a good Malay king is that he has a "religion", meaning that he is religious and capable of bringing prosperity to his people. In the past, watching a story which focused on the profile of a just king could add to his legitimation. It is also of benefit for the crown prince and his family in preparation of his succession.

On the other hand, for the audience, who are generally the common people, their aspirations are voiced by the characters/actors in the Panggung Bangsawan to be delivered to their beloved king. In other words, through a

<sup>8</sup> In a lecture on "French Theatre" at the University of Indonesia, Dr Talha Bachmid explained that performance consists of pre-performance, performance, and post-performance. The difficult part is the post-performance because this is the part where difficult problems arise to be solved.



metaphoric story about royalty, the dialogue or monologue is regarded as an actualization of the people's social and political aspirations.

Similar to other forms of performing arts in Riau Lingga, Panggung Bangsawan has many functions, among others: education including social political education for the people as the story concerns the traditions in a kingdom. It is also a means to protest against the injustice and moral decadence displayed by individuals in the government. Another important function, according to one informant, is that Panggung Bangsawan is a means to entertain the people. This is especially true if the people are, in real life, suffering from boredom in which case the esthetics or beautiful imaginations of this make-believe world, reflected in the story of a just and wise king, can amuse them.

Besides, Panggung Bangsawan will survive if the society who supports it remains willing to appreciate, understand, and enjoy the stories with a local background as reflected in *Permata yang hilang di Pulau Langkawi*. Local stories within a group are still necessary because, apart from being a cultural identity, it can act as a balance to contemporary stories with a global nuance featured in current audio-visual media. It is expected that through local stories differences can be understood and a sense of togetherness can be re-created in a society that shares a similar cultural background.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Folk tales performed in Panggung Bangsawan contain elements of change from the transformation of oral text to performance which can be regarded as a transformation process of storytelling. The folk tales of Teluk village may have originated from a written text, then became oral texts, and further a performance (Arybowo 2000); or vice versa from performance, then oral text, and then into written text. But in the tradition of folk theatre, performance can be conducted without a script because all actors are regarded as having memorized the tales and legends. This also emphasizes the intimate relation between an oral text and a written text and that a written text can move towards orality and vice versa (Sweeney 2008). Besides, after being transformed into a performance text, the plot alters into a text with acts or episodes, as is the case in *Permata yang hilang di Pulau Langkawi*.

After becoming a performance text, the text reveals that the transformation is more objective as it provides a more specific meaning as expressed through its characterization. Besides, from its socio-cultural aspect, the characteristic of *Permata yang hilang di Pulau Langkawi* reveals the intertextual relation of its reference text in acts with a happy ending. Thus, before the existence of an oral text in the Malay world it can be assumed that the written text of *Permata yang hilang di Pulau Langkawi* had already been disseminated amongst the people of Melayu Riau Lingga. Geo-culturally this also indicates that the Malay society in Riau Lingga was already oriented towards its brethren in the Malay Peninsula.

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